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ABSTRACT

Directed at men planning to become fathers, this booklet offers recommendations on how men can increase their chances of producing physically and mentally healthy babies. A number of precautions can be taken both before and after conception. Potential effects of alcohol abuse, drug use and abuse, smoking, and toxic chemicals encountered in the workplace are discussed with respect to men's fertility and impact on the health of the future child. Ways of encouraging and supporting a partner to pursue a healthy lifestyle once she becomes pregnant are also presented. Contains 12 references, a glossary of terms for fathers-to-be, and 6 additional recommended readings. (RB)

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THE FIRST LOOK AT FATHERHOOD

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THE FIRST LOOK AT FATHERHOOD

Ways to Make A Good Impression On Your Baby

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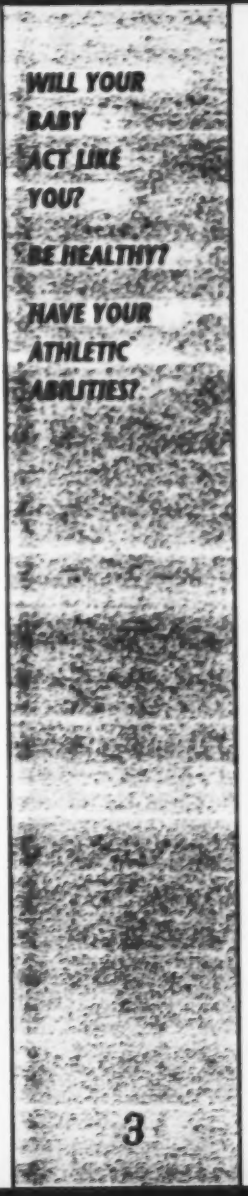


MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ON YOUR BABY

Ever wonder about your future children? Who will they act like? Will they be healthy? Will they have your athletic abilities or your nose? Are they going to follow in your footsteps?

These are all very normal questions for a man to ask once he and his partner begin to think about starting a family.

Yet, regardless of the influence you plan to be on your future children, there are things you can do, before they are conceived, that will influence them for the rest of their lives.

Take a moment to read the following information and discover ways you can make a good impression on your baby—now—before he or she is ever born.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE INSIDE OUT 4

HEALTHY BABIES—UP IN SMOKE 5

BABIES AND BOOZE DON'T MIX 6

KIDS, COCAINE AND OTHER DRUGS 7

HAZARDS IN THE WORK PLACE 8

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS 9

GLOSSARY OF TERMS 10

REFERENCE GUIDE 11

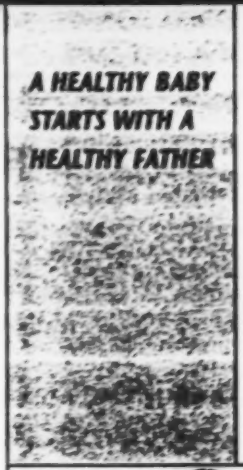
IMPRESSIONS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Your physical health can play an important role in the overall health of your future children.

Studies suggest** that if you drink alcohol, smoke, use other drugs, or are exposed to certain chemicals or environmental hazards (such as lead), you may be unable to father children. You are also more likely to have children with a wide range of physical and mental problems.

Scientists are finding that when you have certain toxic substances in your body, these toxins can:

- enter the testicles through the bloodstream.[1]
- lower your sperm count.[2]
- alter the sperm's motility, or ability to swim.
- damage the sperm—which can cause a miscarriage,
- interfere with reproduction by changing the process through which your sperm are selected for fertilizing the egg.
- potentially be passed to the fetus at conception.[3]



- result in a lower birth weight for your baby, and
- lead to birth defects or serious illnesses for your child after he or she is born.[4]

Since sperm develop over a 3-month period of time, many medical experts advise not using tobacco, alcohol or other drugs for at least 3 months before conceiving a child. If you work around hazardous materials, check with your doctor.[5] (See page 8.)

Throughout this booklet we have used qualifying words such as suggested, *may cause*, *can cause*, and *linked to*. We use these terms because studies **clearly show harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol, other drugs and some substances in the work place. We think there is enough evidence for us to be concerned now. In tests of 100 chemical substances, 50 appear to harm the sperm.[6] Ideally, there will be more research to substantiate these findings.

HEALTHY BABIES — UP IN SMOKE

Until recently, we did not know much about the effects of tobacco or marijuana smoke on a man's reproductive system. We are also just beginning to understand the effects of secondhand smoke on the baby while still in the womb and on the child after he or she is born.

Researchers are finding that smoking may damage the sperm and lower the sperm count.[1] Even smoking half-a-pack a day can reduce your sperm count by as much as 20 percent.[2] Children exposed to their father's smoking **before birth** may be born smaller and may have an increased risk of life threatening diseases such as leukemia, lymphoma, and brain cancer.[3] There is also an increased risk of fathering a child with a cleft lip, cleft palate, water-on-the-brain, or heart defects.[4]

After your child is born you still need to be concerned about the impact of secondhand smoke on them. The effects can be severe because children breathe faster than adults, spend 60-80 percent of their time indoors, and will inhale more secondhand smoke than an adult living in the same household.[5]

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO THEIR FATHER'S SMOKING BEFORE BIRTH MAY BE BORN SMALLER AND MAY HAVE AN INCREASED RISK OF LIFE THREATENING DISEASES.

Children living in a home where there is secondhand smoke, are more likely to have:

- sore throats,
- coughs,
- irritated watery eyes, and
- respiratory infections like bronchitis, pneumonia, and asthma.[6,7]

These children are also more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), to develop cancer, or to contract infections of the lung, stomach and intestine.[8]

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BABIES AND BOOZE DON'T MIX

Sometimes the physical problems which are caused by a father's drinking may not show up until the child is several years old. Yet, studies show that a man's drinking habits **before** he conceives a child can influence the health of his future children.[9]

Heavy alcohol used by the male before conception can be linked to:

- infertility,
- altering of the reproductive chemistry,
- the baby's reduced weight at birth, and
- subtle, long-term, and permanent changes in the child.**[9]

A MAN'S DRINKING HABITS, BEFORE HE CONCEIVES A CHILD, CAN INFLUENCE THE HEALTH OF HIS FUTURE CHILDREN.

When it comes to alcohol, your drinking patterns will **make an impression**, after your son or daughter is born.

- Parents who abuse alcohol are more likely to abuse and neglect their children.
- In **60 percent to 90 percent** of Iowa's Juvenile and Family Court cases, the abuse of alcohol and other drugs played a major role.[11] The Percentages for the State of Utah are similar to Iowa's.
- Each year hundreds of Utahn's are injured in alcohol related automobile crashes.
- One in four people in the U.S. have a parent who has a past or present drinking problem.
- Children of alcoholics have four times greater risk of becoming alcoholics than children of non-alcoholics.
- One out of three American adults say that alcohol abuse has brought trouble to their families.
- Children of alcoholics are at high risk for many emotional and behavioral problems.[12]

**Based on research with animals

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KIDS, COCAINE AND OTHER DRUGS

One of the greatest things about being a dad is watching your children grow and develop.

Why then, **intentionally** use a drug that could cause your child to be born with birth defects?

Men exposed to drugs and other potentially toxic substances have a greater chance of conceiving an abnormal baby.

A man's drug use can:

- decrease his sperm count,
- decrease the sperm's ability to me, and
- increase the number of abnormal forms found in the sperm.[15]

Not only are researchers finding that men's cocaine use may be linked to some mental problems in children, there is evidence that cocaine binds to the sperm and can be carried to the egg during fertilization. This interaction of sperm with some toxins, such as cocaine, may lead to damage of the fertilized egg.[16]

SOME DRUGS CAN BE CARRIED DIRECTLY TO THE EGG BY THE SPERM.

In addition, illegal, intravenous drug use may cause other health risks such as HIV infection. Women who have sexual relations with an HIV-infected partner contract the virus in 85 percent of the cases. A third of all babies born to HIV-infected women will also become infected with the virus.[17]

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HAZARDS IN THE WORK PLACE

In addition to health problems caused by substances we intentionally put into our body, there are many substances in the work place that can impact future children...before they are conceived.

A substance found in many pesticides, DBCP (1,2-dibromo-3- chloropropane), can cause sterility at very low levels of exposure[4] and can affect the movement and overall number of moving sperm. Tests on animals show that a greater exposure to DBCP results in the destruction of sex gland activity.[5]

Another household and industrial chemical that is used in fumigants and industrial sterilizing agents is ethylene oxide (EtO). Exposure to this gas can possibly cause adverse reproductive effects, damage the make up of cells [the genetic material or DNA], and can lead to spontaneous miscarriages.

Although many of the effects of lead poisoning are well known, few people realize that constant overexposure to lead impairs the reproductive systems of **both** men and women. In men, lead exposure can decrease sex drive or cause impotence and sterility. It can also alter the structure of sperm cells, raising the risk of birth defects. Strong evidence links a man's exposure to lead and miscarriages and stillbirths.

SUBSTANCES FOUND IN MANY PESTICIDES, AND HOUSEHOLD AND INDUSTRIAL CHEMICALS CAN CAUSE ADVERSE EFFECTS ON YOUR FUTURE CHILDREN.

Children born to parents exposed to excessive lead levels are more likely to suffer from birth defects, mental retardation, and behavioral disorders, or even die during the first year of childhood.[6]

If you have been exposed to any of the substances discussed above, talk to your physician and your partner's physician before there is a chance you will conceive a child.

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ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Once your partner is pregnant, she and the unborn baby continue to need your help to stay healthy.

- Keep stress at a minimum. Studies show that when women report high stress during pregnancy, their babies are more likely to be born with health problems.
- Be understanding. Pregnancy causes many changes in a woman's body, some more pleasant than others. Your pregnant partner will appreciate your consideration.
- Promote good nutrition. Be a positive influence on your mate by eating wisely. "Junk" food is not healthy for you, the mother-to-be, or your baby.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Fathers-to-be should avoid cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs and encourage the mother-to-be to avoid them, too. Studies show that when one partner smokes, drinks heavily, or uses other drugs, the mate is more likely to use them as well.
- Make exercise a part of your daily routine and encourage your mate to join you. Her doctor should approve all exercise programs she may participate in.

WITH FATHERHOOD COMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION.

- Help with some of the more difficult and strenuous household chores, especially those that involve heavy lifting. Take charge of chores requiring use of aerosol sprays, cleaning fluids, or other chemicals.
- Learn more about the birth process and talk with your partner about some of the choices she and you will be making regarding your baby's birth.

With fatherhood comes responsibility and joy. Take the opportunity to make a good first impression on your baby.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
for Fathers-To-Be

Some of the following terms are used in this booklet. Others are included for informational purposes. Please talk with your doctor if you have questions.

cleft palate: an opening in the roof of the mouth.

fetus: the unborn young developing in the uterus.

genetic material: the material in every cell nucleus, including the egg and sperm, which carries the hereditary characteristics.

gestation: the period of development of the young in the uterus from conception to birth.

infertility in men: the inability of a man to produce sperm which can successfully fertilize an egg.

leukemia: a disease of the blood-forming organs. It is characterized by an increase in the number of white blood cells and abnormal cells in the blood. The course of the disease includes progressive anemia, internal bleeding, and increasing exhaustion.

lymphoma: a cancer of the lymph nodes.

reproductive system: the organs concerned with reproduction, primarily the ovaries, uterus and vagina in the female and the testes, prostate gland, and penis in the male.

sperm count: the number of living sperm observed in a specimen of semen.

sperm motility: the ability of sperm to move forward appropriately.

sperm viability: percent of sperm moving at the time of examination.

toxic substances (toxins): materials or poisonous substances that can cause damage.

water-on-the-brain (hydrocephalus): a condition characterized by an abnormal accumulation of fluid inside the skull. This causes enlargement of the head and destruction of the brain.

womb: the muscular organ in which the fetus develops until birth; also known as the uterus.

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REFERENCE GUIDE

The following sources were used for the text of this pamphlet. To obtain copies of this or other substance abuse related articles contact the Utah Division of Substance Abuse, 120 North 200 West, 4th floor, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103, (801)-538-3939.

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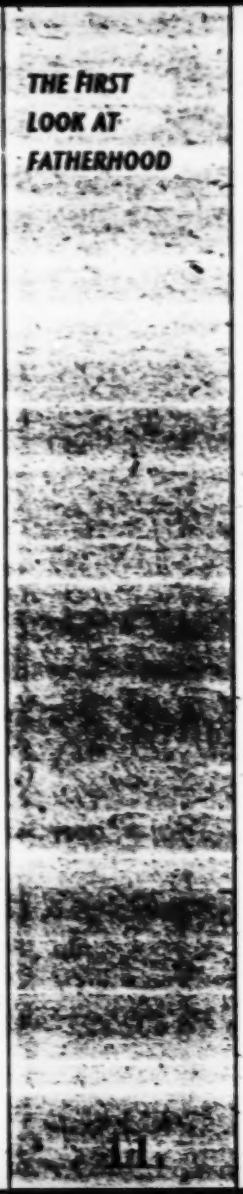

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The First Look at Fatherhood

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